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STEPHEN KING THE DARK TOWER THE GUNSLINGER



THE MAN IN BLACK

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STEPHEN THE DARK KING TOWER

CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
STEPHEN KING

PLOT AND CONSULTATION
ROBIN FURTH

SCRIPT
PETER DAVID

ARTIST
ALEX
MALEEVE

COLOR ART
RICHARD
ISANOVE

LETTERING
VC'S JOE
SABINO

COVER
ALEX MALEEVE

EDITOR IN CHIEF
AXEL ALONSO

PRODUCTION
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VICE PRESIDENT OF CREATIVE
TOM MARVELLI

ASSISTANT EDITOR
ELLIE PYLE

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RALPH MACCHIO

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT
RUWAN JAYATILLEKE

EDITOR
SANA AMANAT

CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER
JOE QUESADA

PUBLISHER
DAN BUCKLEY

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PREVIOUSLY...

Roland Deschain is the last gunslinger of the line of Arthur Eld. He pursues a being called the Man in Black, who Roland believes holds the key to his destiny to reach the Dark Tower and prevent its destruction.

At a way station in the Mohaine Desert, Roland encounters a boy, Jake Chambers, who becomes his companion on his quest. Through an Oracle's premonition he learns: The boy is your gate to the Man in Black. The Man in Black is your gate to the three. The three are your way to the Dark Tower.

What the Oracle doesn't tell Roland is that Jake's gate is Death.

After battling mutants in the dark and emerging on the path toward the light, the end of the underground road, Roland is given a choice: Save the boy or catch the Man in Black. He chooses the Man—he chooses the Dark Tower. Jake falls to his death under the mountains, offering this small consolation: "Go then. There are other worlds than these." Roland is left alone to face his enemy and his destiny.

Now, they will palaver.

This might sound confusing but, as Roland stares down into the abyss that has just swallowed poor, doomed Jake...

This is death, is it?
Is it?

The boy or Roland talking just now. Can't tell you for sure which.

...in a way, he becomes the boy, and the boy becomes him.

A werewolf of his own making, is Roland.

And the Man in Black, he offers nothing save this:

Come, gunslinger. Follow me now, or speak to me never.

Oh no, you don't! I've given up too much to--!

Given up? What have you given up?

Your soul? Your conscience? The boy's safety in your hands?

You can't give up what you never had.

And the only thing you could give up...you never will, even though everything else...soul, conscience, boy...falls away.

...
I hate you.



Ah, but
I admire you,
Roland.

Not an end,
but the end of
the beginning, eh?
You progress, you
progress.



Yes
indeed, how I
admire you.

*The gunslinger draws
with blinding speed
and fires twelve times.*



*The gun flashes dim
the sun itself...*

*...and the pounding of
the explosions slam
back from the rock-
faced escarpment
behind them.*



Now-
now.



Oh
now-now-
now!

We make
great magic
together, you
and I.



You kill
me no more
than you kill
yourself.

Come. Come.
Come.

Mother,
may I? Yes-
you-may.

The Man in Black strolls across the killing ground and the gunslinger follows.

Almost makes you wonder why he was fleeing the gunslinger in the first place if emptying a gun into him don't do nothing.

Perhaps he needed to be in his own territory to survive such a barrage.

*Territory like this:
A golgatha, place of the skull.*

Bleached skulls stare blandly up: cattle, coyotes, bumbler. Here the alabaster xylophone of a hen pheasant, killed as she fed. There the tiny delicate bones of a mole.

I am in the West, Cuthbert. If this is not Mid-world, it's close by.

When you're done chatting with dead friends, gather wood.

I'll kill you.

No, you won't. You can't.

This side of the mountains is gentle, but at this altitude, the cold still may put a knife in your belly. And this is a place of death, eh?

So gather wood to remember your Isaac.

I don't understand that reference.

You understand nothing.

Roland gathers wood like a common cook's boy.

And as the setting sun peers at them with baleful indifference, his slim pickings of wood sits between them.

Excellent. How exceptional you are.



How methodical. How resourceful.



I salute you!

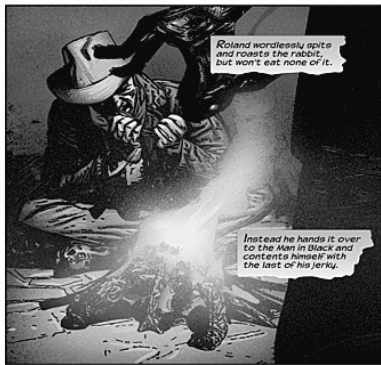


I have matches, but I thought you might enjoy the magic. For a pretty, gunslinger.



Now cook our dinner.

The folds of his robe shiver and the plucked and gutted carcass of a plump rabbit falls on the dirt.



Roland wordlessly spits and roasts the rabbit, but won't eat none of it.

Instead he hands it over to the Man in Black and contents himself with the last of his jerky.





These are
Tarot cards,
gunslinger...
of a sort.

A mixture
of the standard
deck to which have
been added a selection
of my own development.
Now watch
carefully.

What will
I watch?



Seven cards
I will pull to tell
your future.

I've not done this since the days
when Gilead stood and the ladies
played at Points on the west
lawn. And I suspect I've
never read a tale such
as yours.

You are
the world's last
adventurer. The last
crusader. How that
must please you,
Roland.

Yet you have
no idea how close
you stand to the
Tower now, as you
resume your
quest.



What
do you mean,
resume? I never
left off.

Fine. Read
my fortune
then.



The Hanged
man, it's you,
gunslinger, plodding
toward your goal over
the pits of war. You've
already dropped one
co-traveler into that
pit, have you
not?



The young
Sallori lie drowns,
gunslinger, and no
one throws out
the line. The
boy, Jake.



The Prisoner.
A trifle...upsetting,
isn't he.



The Lady
of the Shadows.
Does she look
two-faced to you,
gunslinger?

She is. Two
faces at least.
She broke the
blue plate.



What
do you
mean?

I don't
know.

Why are
you showing
me these?

Don't
ask. Merely
watch. Consider it a
pointless ritual...
like church.



Death.
Yet not for
you.



The
Tower.



Here is
the Tower.

And where
does that
one go?



Over
the Ranged
Man? What
does that
mean?



Fine, don't answer and be damned. What's the seventh card?

Life. But not for you.

Where does it fit the pattern?



That is not for you to know now. Or for me to know.

I am not the great one you seek, Roland. I am merely his emissary.

Sleep now. Perchance to dream and that sort of thing.



What my bullets won't do...



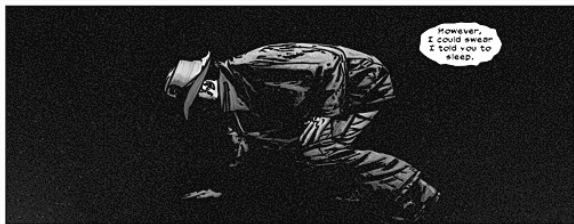
...mayhap my hands will!

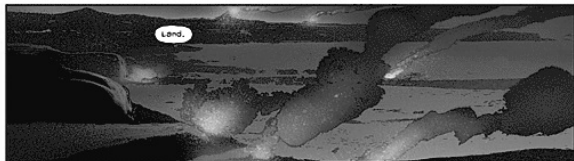
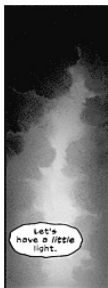


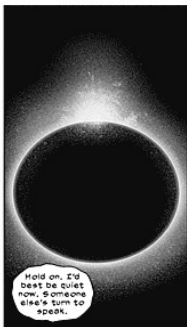
The world fills with the sound of the Man in Black's sardonic laughter.

Roland is falling, dying, sleeping.

Dreaming.









THERE

BE

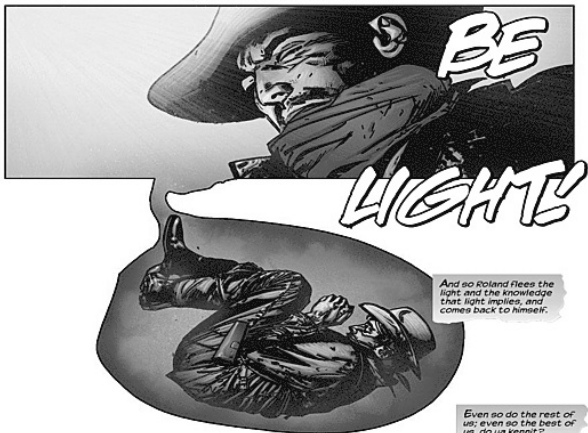


LIGHT!



Then renegade.
Cast away all
thoughts of the
Tower. Go your way,
gunlinger, and begin
the long job of
saving your soul.







I've not departed, gunslinger, wipe that look of despair from your face.

I just don't like you so close.



You talk in your sleep.

You did fairly well, I never could have sent that vision to your father, he would have come back drooling.



What... was it?

The universe.



Universe? I... don't know that word. Sounds like... poetry.

As apt a description as any.

You want the Tower?



Yes.

I have an idea of how close to the edge that lot pushed you. The Tower will kill you half a world away.

Well, you shouldn't have it.



You know nothing of me.







"The universe is the Great All, and offers a paradox too great for the finite mind to grasp.

"There was a time, yet a hundred generations before the world moved on, where mankind had achieved enough technical and scientific prowess to chip a few splinters from the great stone pillar of reality.

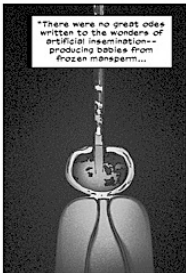


"Gunslinger, our many-times-great grandfather, conquered the disease which-rots, which they called cancer, almost conquered aging, walked on the moon....



"...and one company, or cabal, led the way in this regard: North Central Positronics, it called itself.

"Yet despite a tremendous increase in available facts, there were remarkably few insights.



"There were no great odes written to the wonders of artificial insemination--producing babies from frozen mansperm....



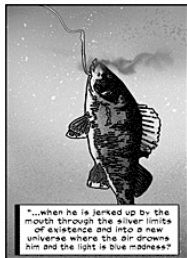
"...or to the cars that ran on power from the sun. They made the wondrous mundane and didn't appreciate the greatest mystery of the universe:



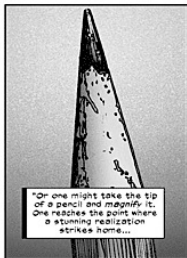
"its size. Size encompasses life, and the Tower encompasses size. Size defeats us.



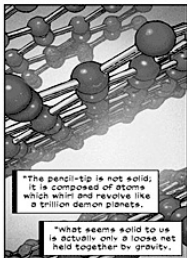
"For the fish, the lake in which he lives is the universe. What does the fish think....



"...when he is jerked up by the mouth through the silver limits of existence and into a new universe where the air draws him and the light is blue madness?"

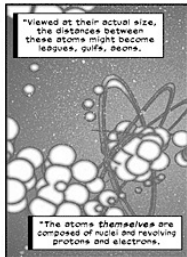


"Or one might take the tip of a pencil and magnify it. One reaches the point where a stunning realization strikes home..."



"The pencil-tip is not solid; it is composed of atoms which whirl and revolve like a trillion demon planets."

"What seems solid to us is actually only a loose net held together by gravity."



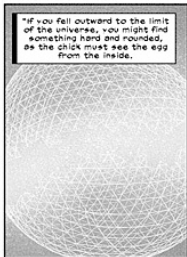
"Viewed at their actual size, the distances between these atoms might become leagues, gulfs, oceans."

"The atoms themselves are composed of nuclei and revolving protons and electrons."



"One may step down further to subatomic particles, and then to what? 'Tachyons?' Nothing? Of course not."

"Everything in the universe denies nothing; to suggest an ending is the absurdity."



"If you fell outward to the limit of the universe, you might find something hard and rounded, as the chick must see the egg from the inside."



"And if you peck through that shell, what great and torrential light might shine through your opening at the end of space?"

"Could it be that everything we can perceive, from the microscopic virus to the Horsehead Nebula, is contained in one blade of grass?"



"And if a God watches over it all, does He mete out justice for a race of gnats among an infinitude of races of gnats?"



"Imagine the sand of the Mohave Desert, which you crossed to find me, and imagine a trillion universes-- not worlds, but universes-- encapsulated in each grain of that desert."

"Yet suppose further. Suppose that all worlds, all universes, met in a single nexus, a single pivot, a Tower.

"And within it, a stairway, perhaps rising to the Godhead itself.

"Would you dare climb to the top, gunslinger? Could it be that somewhere above all of endless reality, there exists a Room...?"

"You dare not."

"Someone has dared."

"Who would that be, Gunslinger?"

"God has dared. Hasn't He?"

"I don't know. It's unwise to ask. There may be...an accounting."

"The fire, I'm cold."

"Build it up yourself. It's the butler's night off."

"When is the sun rising?"

"You seek the light so soon?"

"I was made for light."

"So you were. But this night will go on for as long as my king and master wills it."

"Who is this king?"

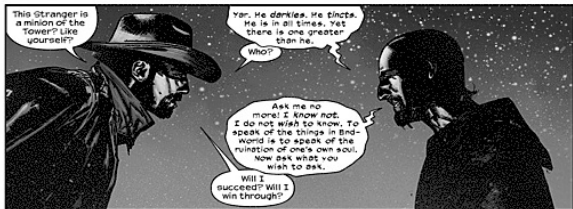
"He comes to me in my dreams, yet I have never seen him. But you must."

"But before you meet him, you must first meet the Ageless Stranger and slay him."

"And this stranger, does he have a name?"

"Oh, he is named. His name is Legion."

"Yet I do not think that is what you wished to ask, gunslinger. It is not your nature to think so far ahead."



"And there was a man who sometimes made you think of him. A man who affected the dress of a monk..."



And the shaven head of a penitent.



Walter!
You! Marten never left at all. You only changed.

Now...now comes the time of sharing, sit. I'll tell you stories, as many as you would hear. Your own stories, I think, will be much longer.



I don't talk of myself. There's nothing *to* talk of. My only purpose is to find the Tower. I'm sworn.

Then you must understand the Tower has *always* been, and there have always been boys who know of it and lust for it, more than power or riches or women.

No one wants to invest you with a power of any kind, gunslinger; it is simply in you...

And I am compelled to tell you, partly because of the sacrifice of the boy and partly because it is the law, the natural law of things. Water must run downhill and you must be told.

You will draw three, I understand... but I don't really care and I don't really want to know.



The oracle spoke of the three...



And then the fun begins! But by then I'll be long gone.

Goodbye, gunslinger. My part is done now. The chain is still in your hands. Woe it doesn't wrap itself around your neck.

You have one more thing to say, don't you.

Yes. Let there be light.





*And there is light,
and this time the
light is good.*

*But the man it shines down
upon, as he awakens stiff
and sore-muscled, is not
the man he was.*

*He's ten years older, his
hair the gray of cobwebs
at the end of autumn.*



*The lines in his
face deeper, his
skin rougher.*

*Nearby is a laughing
skeleton in a rotting
black robe, one more
skull in this Golgotha.*



Or is it
really you?
I have my
doubts, Walter
o'Dim. I have my
doubts, Marten-
that-was.



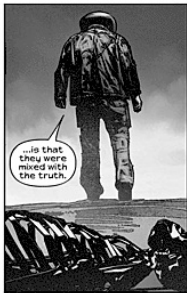
How many
lies did you
tell me?



Many.
I'm sure...



But what
made them
good lies...



...is that
they were
mixed with
the truth.

*The Tower. Somewhere ahead,
it waits for him--the nexus of
Time, the nexus of Size.*

*He begins west again,
his back set against
the sunrise, heading
toward the ocean...*

*...realizing that a great
passage of his life has
come and gone.*

I loved
you, Jake.



*The stiffness wears out of his
body and he begins to walk more
rapidly. By the evening he
comes to the end of the land.*

*The hair, finer now, blows around
his head, and the sandalwood-
inlaid guns of his father lay smooth
and deadly against his hips.*

*He is lonely, but he never was
one to find loneliness in any
way a bad or ignoble thing.*



*He sits on a beach, which
stretches left and right
forever, deserted. The
waves beat endlessly
against the shore,
pounding and pounding.*



*He waits for the time of the
drawing and dreams his long
dreams of the Park Tower,
to which he would someday
come at dusk and approach,
winding his horn...*

*...to do some
unimaginable
final battle.*



THE BEGINNING'S
END.

GRASPING THE INFINITE



Of all the tales we have recounted so far about our wandering gunslinger, this month's installment of Roland's epic adventure is the most elusive and mysterious. Until this point in our story, our tale has been action-oriented. From Roland's battle with the Big Coffin Hunters in Hambry, to the horrors of Jericho Hill, to his lonely trek through the Mohaine Desert where he found Jake Chambers and then located the trail of the Man in Black, our gunslinger has been a dynamic adventurer, actively engaging with his enemies and tackling all of the challenges that arise along the way. However in this issue, Roland takes a much more passive role. True, he tries to shoot the Man in Black (and who can blame him, given the circumstances?), but other than this failed attempt at murder/vengeance, our gunslinger is not the instigator of action but the person *who is acted upon*. Although he has pursued the Man in Black for years, during their meeting in the golgotha, it becomes clear that Roland's enemy has not so much been Roland's quarry but a goad, luring Roland forward to his destiny. And what the Man in Black shows Roland—first in his tarot reading and later in the vision of the multiverse which he imparts—is what *ka* has in store for our protagonist.

The most personal section of this palaver in the golgotha—or perhaps I should say the most specific in terms of the adventures that await Roland—is that of the tarot reading. I have always found this section fascinating, in part because Roland's mysterious enemy so willingly plays the part of fairground psychic. The reading Walter gives is beguiling, but we can't help but wonder



why our elusive sorcerer is suddenly being so helpful. Is it really because Roland sacrificed Jake, or is Walter playing yet another game of castles with our gunslinger? We cannot know for certain, but what we do know is that his deck of cards not only reflects what Roland has done, but also predicts some of what will happen in the coming novels.



The first section of Walter's reading deals with Roland's recent past. Hence the initial card which the Man in Black draws is that of the Hanged Man. According to Roland's longtime enemy, in this reading the Hanged Man signifies strength, not death. It represents the fortitude of our gunslinger, traveling over the pits of Na'ar, or in Roland's case, over the deserts of Mid-World, and over the abyss below the Cyclopean Mountains. Next is the card of the drowned Sailor. This image symbolizes Jake Chambers, the boy who Roland let fall into the abyss so that he could catch the Man in Black. The third card moves from the recent past into the near future. The image is that of the Prisoner—a young man who stares in dread at the baboon who sits astride his shoulder, brandishing a whip. As Constant Readers know, this card represents Eddie Dean, a young junkie who Roland will meet in *The Drawing of the Three*. Despite his nasty drug habit, Eddie is destined to become Roland's

ka-mate and fellow gunslinger.

Like card number three, card number four represents an individual who will become one of Roland's future ka-mates. The Lady of Shadows, who sits at her spinning wheel while she simultaneously smiles and sobs, is none other than Susannah Dean, future wife of Eddie Dean. When Roland first meets Susannah, she suffers from multiple personality disorder and is not one woman but two. Only by coming to Mid-World does she unite her warring selves.

The fifth card Walter draws is much more mysterious. It is the card of Death, but Walter assures us that the death it represents is not Roland's. There are many possible ways to interpret this card. On the one hand, it could represent Jack Mort (whose last name means death), a psychopathic murderer who Roland is destined to meet in *The Drawing of the Three*. However this card could just as easily represent the Mid-World itself, a land





that desiccates and dies as the Beams erode and the Dark Tower destabilizes.

When Walter draws the sixth card, he places it in the center of the pattern, on top of the Hanged Man. This card is that of the Dark Tower—the focus of Roland's lifelong quest. Our gunslinger's *ka* is bound to this linchpin of the time/space continuum, but his quest is also his burden. In his search for the Tower, Roland has abandoned lovers and friends, and has sacrificed the boy Jake. Some would say he has sacrificed his soul. It is no wonder that

it sits atop the Hanged Man like an oppressive weight.

We can't help but wonder whether the seventh card—the card of Life—is as much of a surprise to the Man in Black as it is to Roland. It depicts a rising sun—symbol of resurrection—shining upon a field of blood and roses. If Roland reaches the Tower, it seems to say, there will be a renewal of life force, and life energy. But if the card of Life does not represent Roland (as the Man in Black tells us), then what, exactly, will be renewed if Roland's quest is successful? I would venture to say that the promised Life would be for Mid-World itself. After all, as the direct descendant of Arthur Eld, ancient King of All-World, Roland is the hereditary ruler of Mid-World. As such, the fecundity of the land is his responsibility. Perhaps if he reaches the Tower, the health and prosperity of his world will be restored. We cannot be certain of this, but we do know that the Man in Black is not pleased by this turn in his reading. Hence, he burns the card and refuses to tell Roland its true significance.

After the tarot reading finishes, Roland tries once more to kill the Man in Black. But even as he leaps across the fire to strangle his enemy, the Man in Black forces Roland into a dream which transforms into a vision. Within this vision, Roland glimpses the enormity of the universe, but also the paradox of time/space—namely that all of reality could be contained within a grain of sand, or a blade of grass which lives

but a moment in the time flow of an alien universe. What is enormous in one world is minute in another, and one world's eternity is another's parsec. Yet all of these contradictory universes are united in one edifice—that of the Dark Tower.

The palaver in the golgotha is a transitional point between Roland's adventures as a lone gunslinger and his experiences with a future *ka-tet*, all of whom will be drawn from our world. However the very nature of the conversation—which moves from the personal to the transpersonal and back again—unites the greater themes of the series with the specific adventures which Roland is destined to experience over the next few books. Although we can assume that in giving Roland a tarot reading and overwhelming him with a vision of the multiverse, the Man in Black is acting in his own self-interest. Yet inadvertently, he gives Roland the tools he needs to complete his journey, both in terms of the personal information contained within the Tarot reading, and then in the powerful vision of the multiverse, which reveals the true nature of the Dark Tower and of the time/space continuum.



Well dear friends, I hope that you have enjoyed your time in Mid-World as much as I have. Until we meet again, may the sun never shine in your eyes.

Long days and pleasant nights,

Robin Furth

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEPHANIE HANS

ART EVOLUTION FROM SCRIPT TO COLOR

Scene 7: Roland Awakes

1. But the light is now the light of first dawn. Roland is sleeping by the ruins of a campfire in the Golgotha. The remains of the wood he carried the night before has turned to stone, and the Man in Black is a laughing skeleton in a rotting black robe, more bones in this place of bones, one more skull in this golgotha.

2. Roland now sits up. He looks disoriented, confused. He is ten years older than he was before he fell asleep. His black hair had thinned at the temples and has turned grey. The lines in his face are deeper, his skin rougher.

3. Roland stands over the skeleton of the MIB.

ROLAND: Is it really you Walter o 'Dim? Marten-that-was? I have my doubts.

4. Roland breaks off the skeleton's jaw.

5. And jams it carelessly in the left hip pocket of his jeans. It is a replacement for the jawbone he lost under the mountains.

6. Roland stares at the jawless skeleton still dressed in the MIB's cloak.

ROLAND (to the skeleton): How many lies did you tell me?

ROLAND: But there was one truth that not even you could corrupt. I'll never give up my search for the Tower.

7. The camera remains on the ruins of the fire, and on the skeletal remains of the Man in Black. In the distance, we see Roland walking toward the western horizon. Hovering over the horizon is a ghostly, phantom Tower.

8. Roland is still walking. His back is against the sunrise and he is heading towards the ocean. He is reflecting on Jake's needless death.

ROLAND: I loved you Jake.

9. It is now evening. Roland has come to a deserted beach of grey sand. It seems to stretch on forever.

10. Roland is now sitting on the beach. The waves beat endlessly against the shore, pounding and pounding. The setting sun paints the water in a wide strip of fool's gold. Roland sits, his face turned up into the fading light.

11. The dark has come down, and the sky is full of stars. Roland is lying on his back, his hands behind his head.

12. Roland is now asleep. The stars above have moved into new constellations. We see a constellation that looks like the Dark Tower. And we also see a constellation that looks like a gunslinger approaching the Tower. The star-gunslinger is sounding his horn.

PENCILS AND INKS BY ALEX MALEEV



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NEXT: SHEEMIE'S TALE





The Man in Black flees across the desert with the gunslinger Roland in close pursuit. In his travels, Roland has battled the possessed and the demonic, while meeting an unlikely ally named Jake Chambers, a young boy from another earth. Now, as the distance between Roland and the Man in Black diminishes, Roland is met with a chilling prophecy: he will find the Dark Tower and obtain his vengeance, but will pay for it with the blood of young Jake.

From the renowned creative team of Robin Furth, Peter David, Richard Isanove and Alex Maleev comes the final chapter in the Dark Tower saga. With fantasy, horror, revenge, drama and a dash of the Old West, such a story could only come from storytelling legend Stephen King.

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